

Chapter 17

Verification Platforms in Combating Disinformation on COVID–19 Vaccine News “Doğrula”

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the fact-checking content focusing on misinformation and fake news about COVID-19 vaccines, especially in the media, through the example of Doğrula (doğrula.org), an international fact-checking organization (ICFN) approved fact-checking platform. The data were obtained from the website of the relevant platform (www.dogrula.org). Based on the problem that many distortions, fake news, and claims about COVID-19 vaccines are shared through digital media, the study examines Doğrula’s evaluations of the posts about COVID-19 vaccines circulated in digital media channels. The descriptive analysis method, one of the qualitative research types, was used in the study. Data were obtained through the document analysis technique. Due to a large amount of data to be analyzed within the scope of the study, it covers a one-year period from 25.02.2021 to 25.02.2022, the date when Doğrula first published content.

“Because it is difficult to tell the truth, there is only one truth, but this truth is alive, and therefore its face is constantly changing like that of a living creature”

Franz Kafka

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SUMMARY

In the digital media environment, disinformation content called “misinformation” or “fake news” spreads rapidly and reaches the masses. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, much fake news was produced about vaccines, which are seen as one of the effective methods of preventing or preventing the disease. All this constituted one of the prominent examples of the phenomenon defined as “infodemic”. Verification platforms, which aim to provide individuals with accurate information, have a severe role in combating the “infodemic” in terms of detecting and verifying false information and fake news. In the post-truth era, we are in, many changes have occurred with the development of communication technologies. With the increase in digitalization, individuals have become producers-consumers by creating and disseminating news on social media. As a result, Digital channels have surpassed traditional media in terms of access to news. According to the Reuters Institute 2021 Digital News Report, social media has overtaken television as Turkey’s most used news source (2022).

With the spread of digitalization and new media channels, the number of information and news sources is increasing daily. This has made news production no longer an area of specialization, and individuals have shifted from being consumers to producers. Thus, the problem of misinformation and fake news has become increasingly widespread. With the speed of dissemination in the digital environment, this misinformation and fake news can reach large masses within minutes. WHO conceptualized this situation as “misinformation epidemic”, in other words, “infodemic”. Verification platforms, which emerged as a response to the spread of misinformation and fake news, play a functional role in confirming the accuracy of the news or information shared. Through verification platforms, confusion is eliminated, and the source of information is questioned. Although the need for news verification dates back to ancient times, the possibilities of new media have paved the way for the emergence of digital verification platforms (Kavaklı, 2009). Digital verification platforms enable “...the evaluation of verifiable claims in public statements through the investigation of primary and secondary sources” (Brandtzaeg and Folstad, 2017: 65).

Verification platforms, which emerged in the US in the 2000s, spread all over the world in a short period. The increase in the number of fact-checking platforms worldwide has created the need to create standardization by bringing these platforms together. In 2015, the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) was established within the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in Florida, USA. The IFCN has set some principles for news verification platforms and named this Code of Principles. Fact-checking platforms that undertake to create content following these principles become IFCN signatories as members of the network. The membership control of the signatory platforms is reviewed every year, and the memberships of the platforms that meet the conditions are renewed. Three verification platforms from Turkey are members of this network and are IFCN signatories. The first one is Doğruluk Payı, the second one is Teyit, and the third one is Doğrula. These verification platforms have played an active role in verifying health issues, related claims, misinformation, and fake news that emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this context, this study examines the fact-checking content focusing on misinformation and fake news about Covid-19 vaccines, especially in the media, through the example of Doğrula (doğrula.org), an International Fact-Checking Organization (IFCN) approved fact-checking platform. The data was obtained from the website of the relevant platform (www.dogrula.org). Based on the problem that many distortions, fake news, and claims about Covid-19 vaccines are shared through digital media, the study examines Doğrula’s evaluations of the posts about Covid-19 vaccines circulated in digital media chan-

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